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WHEN PARENTS GROW OLD

BY ELIZABETH OGG

PUBLIC AFFAIRS PAMPHLET NO. 208

REMOTE STORAGE

AS a business man concerned with private pension plans to provide retirement for people, I have a keen realization of both the need for security in the later years, and the magnitude of the financial undertaking required to meet that need. For example, if all of the eligible employees were to have pensions, even at current amounts, the dollars required, funded on an actuarially sound basis, would exceed in value all of the stocks listed on the New York Stock Exchange at the end of 1953.

Through my association with members of the National Committee on the Aging, I have learned that while the economic side is of great importance there are many other phases requiring study and understanding. We must learn to make personal adjustments to certain inevitable changes which come with age, if we are to enjoy the full benefits of the added years medical science has given to us. This pamphlet, so ably written by Miss Ogg, should be of great value in explaining some of these changes and in helping families to work out satisfactory relationships between members of different ages.

G. Warfield Hobbs

Chairman,
National Committee on the Aging of the
National Social Welfare Assembly

THE PUBLIC AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

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WHEN PARENTS GROW OLD

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BY ELIZABETH OGG

Elizabeth Ogg has written numerous Public Affairs Pamphlets, the most recent of which were Preparing Tomorrow's Nurses *and* Why Some Women Stay Single.

EVERYONE in that small midwestern town knew why the Kennedy sisters never invited school friends home or gave parties. It was on account of Grandma. She was crotchety and might suddenly order guests to go home. She was inordinately suspicious too. The outer doors had to be kept locked, and young Mrs. Kennedy had to hang her wash out at night while the old lady was asleep and couldn't fuss about some one stealing it off the line. When Grandma followed a siege of pneumonia with a fall and broke her hip, the older Kennedy girl had to give up her college education. Grandma was a load the family carried for fifteen years.

Mr. Hartmann, Senior, lived with his son and daughter-in-law and their three-year-old son in a big eastern city. He and the child were fast friends and spent many hours together. The boy's mother was grateful for the baby-sitting and fond of the old man too. But the apartment was cramped, and Grandpa had to sleep on the living-room couch. When guests came, he couldn't go to bed until long after his usual hour, and he felt miserably in the way. Should he try to get into an old folk's home? he wondered. The very idea appalled him. The younger Hartmanns would have been ashamed to let him go into a home. Yet they felt guilty because they couldn't make him really happy and comfortable.

When Margaret Graham invited her widowed mother to live with her in suburban San Francisco, both her children were away at

school. So she let Mrs. Burns furnish the downstairs playroom as a bed-sitting room with her own most cherished things. There the older woman studies philosophy and listens to music. There, too, she receives visitors and holds an occasional welfare committee meeting. Wisely she never criticizes or interferes in her daughter's affairs, or asks prying questions. "Let's ask Grandma," the children often say when something puzzles them. They enjoy her dry humor and brief but pointed stories. Out of her modest funds, Mrs. Burns gives the family a theater or concert party now and then, and thoughtful little gifts. The Grahams hardly think of her as old, she is growing old so gracefully.

old age is everybody's problem

If every family had health, maturity, financial resources, and living space to match the Grahams', there would be no need for this pamphlet. Too many, unfortunately, face some variant of the Kennedys' or the Hartmanns' problem. And there are going to be more and more such families.

In the last half-century, while our population as a whole barely doubled, the group of people over 65 years old increased almost four times. The average life-span climbed about twenty years. In 1950 we had 14,000,000 oldsters, but by 1975 some 21,000,000 Americans will be over 65 — nearly three-fifths of them women. Those with families will look to their children when health or finances fail. And already the children are asking, more frequently and often urgently, "What shall we do about Mother (or Father)?"

In our youth-worshipping society we all too often reject old age. We sometimes behave as if, after a fixed age, human beings could no longer be expected to have any real capacities to develop or contributions to make. So we stunt their later growth, and breed feelings of inferiority and frustration that give rise to all sorts of personality difficulties, neuroses, and psychosomatic illness.

Along with this experience of rejection, most old people suffer a sharp reduction of income; some have no income at all. The last census showed that, whereas men 55 to 64 years old had a median

income of $2,494, those 65 and over had a median income of only $986. Despite the expansion of Social Security and higher benefits, social insurance and pensions alone are rarely sufficient for an adequate standard of living, and savings, if any, may be wiped out by severe or prolonged illness. More than one-sixth of those 65 and over are believed to be supported by children or other relatives.

There are no longer many large family homesteads with warm chimney corners for the old folks, and little household tasks for their hands. Living space has shrunk, and much domestic work is now sent out or mechanized. The high cost of housing makes it hard for even well-to-do families to arrange suitable care for a parent who is getting old. Few with such a parent escape difficulties altogether, whether with finances, housing, health, or personalities. Perhaps you have no such problem now. Some day you may have.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

There are no ready-made or blanket solutions. Each old person is an individual, each family is made up of individuals and must work out its own plan for the care of an aging parent. There are, however, some ideas that will help you in reaching a satisfactory solution.

Discuss the problem frankly and openly. Give everybody concerned a voice. Try to arrive at a joint decision about what should be done. Consider the needs of each member of the family.

Old folks' needs are much the same as younger people's. Besides food, clothing, and shelter, they need to be useful, whether in the small world of the family or in the wider world beyond. They need to be active, to keep body and mind from stagnating, and to preserve a sense of participating in life. Younger folk, with mistaken kindliness, often urge Grandpa and Grandma to "take it easy, sit and rest." This is one sure way to let all their powers run down as they wait dismally for death.

Like everyone else, Grandpa and Grandma need the warmth of affection and the feeling of status born of respect. They can't thrive if they are on sufferance. And like everyone else, they need at least

some areas of freedom and independence — a little money to spend as they please, some privacy and a place for personal possessions, and, as long as they are capable of rational thought, the right to make decisions for themselves.

In the case of an older person, these simple human needs are often overlooked. They should not be satisfied, however, wholly at the expense of other members of the family. In a combined household, each individual has to make some sacrifices and some adjustments. But try to keep sacrifices down all around. No family can possibly be happy with a martyr in its midst.

With this general approach, let us look at the choices open today to parents who are getting on in years, and to their children who want to help them make a satisfactory plan for later life. Then we can glance at some ideas about how the community can help.

PRESERVE INDEPENDENCE AS LONG AS POSSIBLE

Old folks should stay in their own homes as long as they can possibly manage it. To give up one's private "castle" is to lose a precious area of freedom and self-esteem. A home of one's own is both a symbol and an essential ingredient of independence.

Many people unthinkingly regard the death of a spouse which leaves an elderly person widowed and alone, or the onset of some physical disability, as the signal for liquidating an independent life. Shocked by Father's sudden death, children in a rush of compassion urge Mother to come and live with them. Mother, bereft of her life-long partner, feels at first that her life is over and she might as well throw in the sponge. Better think twice about such sentimental impulses.

don't rashly liquidate the old home

The Raffos had been living for twenty years in their own pleasant suburban house when Mr. Raffo died. Although only 69 and hale and hearty, his widow impulsively gave most of her fine silver, china, and linen to her two daughters-in-law. Their acceptance of the

things, even though they didn't particularly want them, suggested that they agreed the old lady wouldn't be around much longer. House and land were sold, all the furniture auctioned off, and Mrs. Raffo went to live alternately with one son in New York and the other in Boston.

Result: Mrs. Raffo felt she had no place to call her own. Walking the city pavements, she thought nostalgically of every tree, shrub, and plant she and her husband had so lovingly tended. Her sons' modern homes offered every physical comfort, but she longed for her mellow traditional furnishings — especially her favorite armchair and the walnut secretary in which she had kept photo albums and other mementoes, now all packed away in a trunk in her eldest son's attic. Her grandchildren, whose brief visits she had previously enjoyed, now seemed to her rowdy and quarrelsome, and she didn't approve of their mothers' permissive ways with them. Even her beloved sons sounded like strangers to her when she heard them talking with certain of their contemporaries.

As for the sons and their wives, old Mrs. Raffo's presence was a constant strain. They could not and would not make their lives

over to suit her, yet her silent disapproval weighed on them. Relationships which had been easy while the two generations maintained separate households were now bursting at the seams.

In the end Mrs. Raffo wisely decided to take a small apartment in a Boston suburb and live alone. But she never ceased to regret the loss of her house, her garden, her furniture, and all their treasured associations.

ways to independence

At 72, growing deaf, with high blood pressure and only a small pension to live on, Mrs. Schuster could neither afford nor take care of the roomy house and grounds her husband had left her. While her sons and daughters were debating which of them should take her in first, she astonished them all by renting her two upper floors to a family with five children.

As Mrs. Schuster was forbidden to climb stairs, she couldn't use the two upper floors anyway. In lieu of part payment of rent, the man of the family undertook to tend the furnace and grounds. His wife agreed to answer the telephone and doorbell for Mrs. Schuster, and do her errands any time she didn't feel well enough to go out. The cash rent brought Mrs. Schuster's income up to a level which covered her expenses. The children didn't disturb her one bit: they brought life into the house, she said. The tenants for their part were overjoyed to find living space for so large a family at a rent they could afford, and with a yard for the children to play in.

Many an old person has found some similar way to keep a beloved home after being left alone in it. One elderly widow took in roomers, and got so interested in looking after them that she cut down on her visits to her children. She was needed at home, she said. A housekeeper for Grandpa, when Grandma is gone, may be better than taking him away from his familiar surroundings. Two elderly women may decide to live together in the home of one of them. (But that will work only if their temperaments and habits are congenial. If one is neat and punctual, the other untidy and tardy, an affectionate relationship will expire in mutual irritation.)

the fear of loneliness

The feeling that you can't bear the empty house after the death of your spouse may tempt you into an ill-thought-out living arrangement. Take a trip or pay an extended visit to friends or relatives before you decide. This will tide you over to the point where you can think quietly and realistically about the future. By then, painful associations with bereavement will probably have given way to memories of happier times in your home. These may be so great a consolation that you will want to remain in the place that reminds you of them at every turn.

But if you are one of those who, whether old or young, cannot live alone with serenity, you will need either to go where you can find companionship or else bring companionship to you.

Some people don't relish the thought of sharing their homes with strangers, even though they may need their services. Fiercely independent old Mrs. Ross was determined to stay in her own home alone. When failing eyesight and increasing infirmity made it impossible for her to manage by herself any more, she reluctantly agreed to have a housekeeper. The presence of this unwelcome stranger acted as a beneficial irritant. Insisting that the housekeeper didn't know how to cook, Mrs. Ross first took over the meal preparation. Her strength reviving, she went on to do more and more of the cleaning, which she claimed the housekeeper didn't do "properly." After six months, she dismissed the housekeeper. To everyone's astonishment, Mrs. Ross managed on her own for the two remaining years of her life.

Many an oldster, on the other hand, has resisted the idea of a stranger in the house only to find, on adopting it, that the new

presence was both a comfort and a stimulus. At the very least, a stranger is a fresh audience, not apt to criticize any lapses of memory or other inaccuracies in one's stories, the way one's relatives do!

If finances, the fear of loneliness, or the fear of strangers in the house do not allow you to maintain the old home, or if it is far away from where the children live and you want to be near them, a small apartment or room in the neighborhood of a son's or daughter's home is likely to be a better solution than doubling up. There you can have your own things and lead your own life.

Even when health or faculties begin to fail, you still may not need to double up. Sometimes the effort to surmount disabilities and keep going is the very thing that maintains old folks' vigor, whereas supinely accepting "being taken care of" would only accelerate their decline.

how the children can help

As son or daughter, you do more for your aging parents by supporting this effort than by encouraging surrender. You might provide a weekly cleaning woman or a visiting housekeeper to relieve your arthritic mother of the heavier domestic chores. In many communities the Council of Social Agencies runs a visiting housekeeper service or can tell you who does. The housekeeper may come twice a week, or for an hour or two a day, do cleaning or prepare a hot meal, depending on what her client requires. She has some training, and knows what she is and is not able to do, when to call in professional help, and so on. This organized service is providing a new earning opportunity for able-bodied older women whose families are grown. If your parent has diabetes or a heart condition, arrange for a visiting nurse to give injections and help plan diet and household routines.

Perhaps you can stock the refrigerator with cooked foods twice a week, or give your parents cooked food to take home after they have dined with you. Be sure to offer such little services casually — not in a way that suggests your parents are becoming helpless. "This beef stew turned out so well, I thought you might enjoy some."

If your old mother is house-bound but not bed-bound, merely providing for marketing and errands to be done may be sufficient to keep her going in her own household. Boy and Girl Scouts have programs for helping old people in this way. Many voluntary welfare agencies run home-visiting services — to bring cheer, to find out what is needed, run errands, read aloud, write letters, and so on. The golden-age clubs which have sprung up in the past few years also keep their house-bound members in touch with the outside world. They visit and telephone them, write letters, and perform other small services.

For a mother or father who cannot climb stairs, you may have to find a ground-floor or elevator apartment or room. For one with uncertain balance, see that railings to hang on to are installed at strategic spots. A railing on both sides of a stairway makes stair climbing easier and safer for most elderly people. A telephone right by the bed may be an actual lifesaver some day. Aside from that, it removes right away the nagging fear of not being able to summon help in time of need, and is a welcome link with family and friends.

what will others say?

A widowed parent may hear comments from contemporaries like, "It's a shame, the way you have to live alone. Why don't you go to your daughter?" Or "Why doesn't your son take you in?" One mother who was perfectly happy on her own was so worn down by such remarks that she finally gave in and went to live with her daughter, where she was perfectly miserable. It's a mistake to let others decide such an important matter. Usually they haven't thought deeply about the problem at all, but merely echo traditional sentiments that take no account of the particular situation.

As a child who is "letting your old mother struggle on alone," you may suffer still worse pangs when you overhear critical remarks, or imagine them being made behind your back. Since you are escaping the major upheaval of fitting your parent into your household, you are apt to feel guilty. You forget that the separation is better for your mother too.

Remember that we are not endowed with the same solicitude for an aging parent as we feel for a child. Caring for the old is a socially implanted responsibility. Our feelings toward our parents are a compound of love and resentment — love for their care and resentment for all the occasions in our childhood when they curbed and punished us. However affectionate our adult relations with them, the underlying resentments are apt to linger. Parents too resent as well as love their children. Few really relish their children's independence or enjoy their being "different."

Since we all harbor some such resentments, on one side or the other, we need not feel guilty about them. Let us recognize them candidly. Then we can agree that parents and adult children should live separately if possible, regardless of what other people say.

DOUBLING UP

What if finances won't permit separate households, or your mother or father can't manage alone any more? You decide to double up.

Discuss the arrangements thoroughly in advance. Try to forestall arguments about money, division of domestic chores, disposition of your parent's furniture, meal times and menus, use of the bathroom, and allotment of living space. Agree on these matters before your parent moves in with you.

separate under one roof

Perhaps the hardest thing to achieve in a combined household is a balance between separation and belonging. Two generations of adults who try to live quite separately under one roof never really succeed, and often the attempt arouses all sorts of ill feeling. Yet some separation is desirable.

If possible, give your mother a room of her own, furnished with her own things or at least with one or two pieces from her old home. No one else should enter this room without knocking. If your mother can have her particular friends visit with her there, the household will be less disrupted by their arrival. If no separate

room is available, try to give her a corner with her own chair and lamp and, for her possessions, two or three drawers in a desk or chest which the rest of the family will treat as inviolate.

Another element of separateness is a little money of one's own to spend as one pleases. Even if you are wholly supporting your mother, try to let her have a small sum regularly as pocket money. Don't reprove her if she spends it, as you think, unwisely. She may buy toys for her grandchildren or treat herself to a quite unnecessary new hat. In either case, she is exercising her right to be an independent person, with spontaneous impulses of her own. Granting her this right will help to keep her young and well.

a sense of belonging

Having a mother or mother-in-law run the house for you may be a boon if you hold an exacting job or hate housekeeping. But ordinarily the younger woman remains in charge and sets the stamp of her personality on the home management.

Don't snub your mother if she offers help. She won't be happy just sitting around, feeling useless. But don't throw her only the dull chores, like dish-washing, either. If she cooks some dishes particularly well, allow her an occasional guest performance in the

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kitchen, and let the whole family praise the results. If she is good at planning a party, ask her to take over. Grandma can be invaluable in helping care for a new baby, nursing a sick youngster, canning and preserving, mending, taking the children on outings. But give her a chance to choose or refuse chores. Don't expect her, for example, to baby-sit any and every night that suits you. She may have other plans, or just not feel up to it.

For Grandpa it may be more difficult to find jobs that will give him a sense of belonging. If he is good at figures, he may be delighted to keep accounts or take care of business dealings for you. Is he a handyman who can fix electric appliances, put a new washer on the faucet, or do an odd job of painting or carpentry? He might do light gardening, run errands, or baby-sit.

It is touching to see how grateful old people often are for such small recognitions of their capacities, and such small chances to earn a little appreciation.

a problem parent

Some one who has been master or mistress of a household finds it hard to step down and become a mere appendage of some one else's — and that at a time of life when habits have usually become set. What if your parent won't accept a secondary role? What if your mother or mother-in-law keeps criticizing, interfering, telling you how things were done in her day?

This is, of course, a difficult situation. But remember that an old person's harping on "the good old days" is usually a bid for attention and reminiscent of the status he or she has lost. It also represents a lot of energy which has no other outlet. Providing a more constructive way to use the energy and at the same time regain status may put an end to the annoying habit.

If your mother is the managerial type with plenty of surplus energy,

the best thing is to interest her in some activity outside the home. It could be church or welfare work, a golden-age club, or a community center. Recreation day centers for those over 60 years old have sprung up recently in several cities — there are about a score in New York City alone. Besides giving instruction in various crafts, music, painting, languages, and even mathematics and elocution, they offer all sorts of opportunities for leadership. The centers themselves are self-governing, as are smaller circles within them, such as discussion and dramatics groups. There are excursions, visits to sick members, and monthly birthday parties to be organized. In such a place your mother might learn to be more flexible, and she might get herself elected to some office. Then her managerial impulses, given a legitimate outlet, would be far less likely to clash with yours. Having acquired status outside, she would feel less need to demand it at home — and you would find it easier to grant it to her.

What's more, she would come back refreshed and stimulated, with new viewpoints. The sharp edge of her criticism might well have been tempered by hearing about other old folks' children — irresponsible, slapdash, disrespectful children, perhaps. She would begin to see you as not so bad after all!

a normal social life

An intelligent, 70-year-old widow said of a golden-age club, "I don't think you can appreciate what it means to be able to sit down to a table and have a conversation with a man. All I see most of the time are women. At my age, I can't go places in the evening where men are, so I stay home."

There is no reason why two generations should share all the same friends. To try to do so puts a strain on both. A club offers a place

where your mother can meet cronies of both sexes and enjoy social life without having it impinge on the rest of the family. She might even find romance there. If she should want to marry again, you may urge careful consideration, but don't frown on the idea altogether. In regarding marriage as an experience worth repeating, she could pay no higher tribute to your father's memory.

a word to the aging parent

Now a word to the aging parent who goes to live with a grown child and family. You have a big adjustment to make, at a difficult time of life. Probably you will give up more than your children and grandchildren, who will continue to live in their own home in their own way while you will have to "fit in." But if you want to make a success of this chapter of life, treat it as a challenge, not a cross. So:

1. Try not to criticize your children's way of life, however much it irks you, and don't offer advice unless asked.

2. Don't hark back to "the good old days," unless you can tell an interesting story about them. The younger generation have to live in their own time. It irritates them to be told how much better things were in your day. Some things may have been, but they know that other things were not — medical science, to mention only one. Make an effort to see ways in which life (even housekeeping!) has improved.

3. Don't either play off your grandchildren against their parents, or try to recast them in your image. You can have far more unalloyed fun with your grandchildren than you ever did with your own children, just because you can enjoy with them what some primitive peoples call "the joking relationship" (the one without responsibility for discipline). But don't disregard family rules.

4. Maintain a life of your own. Keep up with your old friends, and make new ones if you can. Cultivate some personal interests — reading, music, a course of study, a craft, membership in a club or center, part-time volunteer work such as visiting "shut-ins" or playing with children in hospital wards, even a paid job if you are

up to it and can find one. Whatever you do should be worth while — to you. Crocheting lace that nobody wants will do nothing for your morale. Knitting socks or sweaters for people who will wear and appreciate them will. Learning ceramics or French, if it really interests you, will do more than taking up stamp-collecting merely to "pass the time."

5. Pay attention to your looks and dress. This will be easier if you follow suggestion No. 4.

6. Don't *demand* consideration on the score of your age. Try to *earn* it by making a respected and contributing role for yourself. Help with the chores, offer thoughtful little gifts and occasional treats, if you can afford them. Don't indulge in self-pity, don't lean on others. Keep cheerful and alert. Give and take in conversation. The more you can be an interested and interesting person, the more the family will love and consider you as a matter of course.

Difficult? Yes, very difficult. But something to strive for in old age, as in any other phase of life. Such striving is a condition of healthy growth, and happiness is its by-product.

A HOME WITH A CAPITAL "H"

Of course not every family can take an aging parent in. There may be too little room or too little money. Perhaps they already have all the burdens they can carry, or cannot provide the care the parent needs. They may be estranged or indifferent. In that case their unwillingess to offer a haven is not worth arguing about. Even if they could be persuaded to give it, the resulting clash of personalities would make for a most unhappy life all around.

In such situations the only refuge for an incapacitated older person has traditionally been a nursing home or a Home for the Aged.

The only existing national directory of Homes for the Aged is seriously out of date. Most state health and welfare departments, however, can supply information on such institutions in their states, since one of these departments usually is responsible for accrediting or otherwise regulating them.

finding a home for the aged

In your own locality you can find out about Homes for the Aged from the Council of Social Agencies, the Department of Public Welfare, or the Family Service Society. If you belong to a congregation, ask your minister or rabbi about Homes run by your religious group. Some labor unions, Freemasons, and other fraternal organizations also maintain Homes for their aged members. If you are a veteran, or related to one, the local chapter of a veterans organization may be able to help you.

In their book, *You and Your Aging Parents,* Edith M. Stern and Mabel Ross suggest some simple ways of judging an old people's Home. These you will find summarized in the chart on page 18.

homes are not for the able-bodied

Practically no good Home today is without a long waiting list. At best you probably will have to wait at least two years for admission, perhaps four or five. There are some who feel therefore, that Homes should be reserved for the sick and incapacitated, not the well or moderately well. But among the sick should be included those with severe emotional difficulties. The clinging vine type of woman, for example, may have as hard a time, when left alone in old age, as a paralytic. If she has nowhere else to go, a Home may be the right place for her. And there are many people who are not ill or incapacitated who find great satisfaction in such Homes.

non-resident membership in a home

Troubled by their long waiting lists, some of the better Homes have organized a sort of "out-resident" system, variously called home care, non-resident aid, and temporary outside maintenance. Old folks who have been accepted for future admission are brought under the wing of the institution. The Home provides medical care and regular visits by a trained social worker. Best of all, it relieves "out-patients" of all anxiety about what would happen if they should fall ill or have an accident. They have a promise that in case of urgent need they will immediately be admitted to the Home.

a life-line to the rescue

Mr. Hollander, a talented violinist, had lost his orchestra and teaching jobs at the age of 71, when chronic arthritis crippled his hands. His only daughter, herself widowed and with two children to support, had no room or money to spare. As his savings dwindled, Mr. Hollander began to take refuge in unreality. Often he forgot the address of the rooming house where he lived, and was brought back by a friendly policeman. It looked as if he were headed for a mental hospital when his daughter, frantic with worry, applied to a social agency for help.

After looking into his situation, a Home for the Aged accepted Mr. Hollander as a non-resident member. Its staff physician treated him for arthritis. His telephone, which in his anxiety over money he had had taken out, was restored. Then he could call the Home in case of need, and the staff there could settle many small matters with him without time-consuming visits. The social worker helped him set up a budget, including low-cost but balanced meals in a cafeteria. When his savings were exhausted, he would be eligible for public assistance grants, she told him, and she would help him apply for these. He began to enjoy social activities at the Home, which he could reach by bus.

Later on, with his hands much improved, Mr. Hollander went to a vocational counseling agency to which the case worker referred him, and got some part-time work as a music copyist. His earnings have eked out his savings, and so far he hasn't had to apply for public assistance. In gratitude he does some volunteer work in the office of the Home, addressing and stamping envelopes.

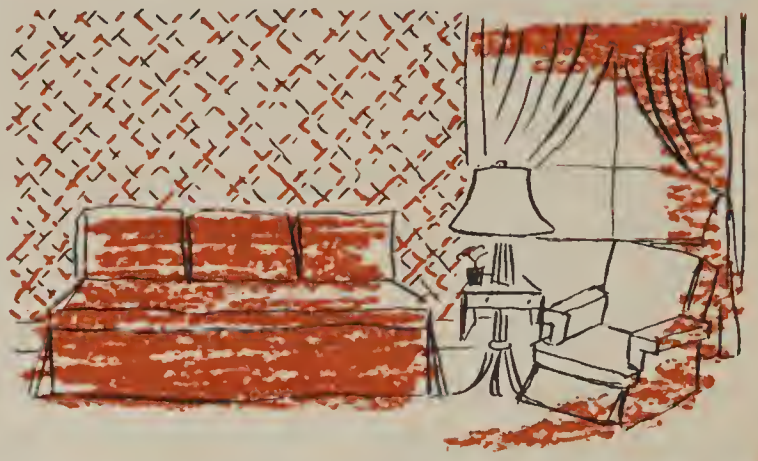
Meantime, if you dropped in on Mr. Hollander in his sunny room with the canary singing in the window and the photographs of famous conductors on the walls, he would smilingly offer you a chair and a cup of tea. You would have no doubt that here was a contented and serene old man.

Although the Home keeps three or four beds vacant for emergency admissions of just such people as Mr. Hollander, such emergencies rarely arise. All the support given by the Home acts as a bulwark

HOW TO JUDGE A HOME FOR THE AGED

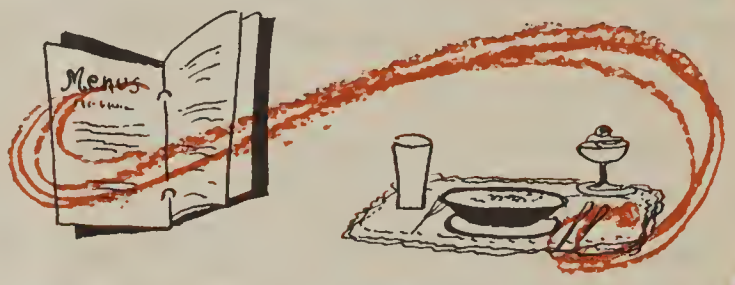
ROOMS

Are the rooms and the buildings clean, comfortable, well - ventilated and lighted? Can a resident have some of his own belongings, express his own personality?



MEALS

Look over a week's menus and, if possible, sample a meal.



MEDICAL CARE

Is it adequate, and prompt? A well - equipped infirmary for minor ills is a "must". Also provision for both long- and short-term hospitalization should exist.

PROGRAM

Are there too many rules — or are residents free to come and go as they please? Do they appear cheerful, relaxed? Can they have visitors? parties? go to church? govern themselves? What entertainment and occupations are available?

against an old person's sudden collapse. What usually happens is that the watchful eyes of doctor and social worker detect little signs that his strength is failing, and the Home prepares to admit him.

moving into a home for the aged

Children, relatives, and friends can do much to ease this dreaded step. Obviously the Home should be the oldster's own choice. No good Home will accept a person who has not chosen it himself. He should be thoroughly prepared for the move — not hurried into it without understanding what it entails. You can smooth the change by visiting him often and, if he is well enough, being visited in the same way as before. Do all you can to keep him in touch with his old friends and interests.

Going into a Home for the Aged need not be the sad fate many people think it is. One old Scandinavian immigrant who had made a small fortune in business actually chose to go into a County Home (for paupers) as a paying guest. Most of his boyhood friends who had immigrated with him had ended up there. He had been paying them regular visits in the Home, and could think of no more companionable place in which to end his days.

FOSTER HOMES—A CREATIVE COMPROMISE

Nowadays in a few communities there is a sort of halfway house between complete independence and going to live with relatives or in an institution. This is a foster home.

Mrs. Morris, at 73 a diabetic with failing eyesight, still had a lively interest in people and strong opinions about housekeeping and child-rearing. When she went to live with her daughter, she made up her mind "not to be a burden." But she could hardly contain her irritation when her daughter served slapdash meals *without a tablecloth*, neglected to dust, and told her two-year-old to go bang-bang with a hammer on a peg-board she had bought him. When a second child was about to be born, other arrangements had to be made for Mrs. Morris, who by now had a "heart condition."

Through the local family service society, mother and daughter were overjoyed to learn that a boarding home might be found to care for the old lady. Would Mrs. Morris be able to have her special diet? Yes. And her injections? A visiting nurse would take care of them. And a ground-floor room would be found so that she wouldn't have to climb stairs.

a new lease on life for mrs. morris

The staff worker insisted on talking to Mrs. Morris alone, to make sure that she really wanted to take this step. The old lady was enthusiastic. She saw it as a return to the independence she had lost when she went to live with her daughter.

So within a few days she was invited to come to the agency to meet the family who had been selected as her hosts. A kindly, middle-aged couple, the Owens, greeted her warmly. They told her about their house, and about their other paying guest, a former teacher who had spent some years in a mental institution but was now a charming old lady whose only trouble was arteriosclerosis. Mrs. Morris' curiosity was aroused, and she couldn't wait to meet her house-mate.

Under the tactful guidance of the case worker, Mrs. Morris moved into her foster home, and came through the three-months trial period with enthusiasm unabated. Her "heart condition" vanished, she even started doing some of the cooking. She and her house-mate go to church regularly. They sing old hymns and ballads, and talk endlessly together. Each provides the other with a new audience for her life-story. Mrs. Morris' daughter and son-in-law are astonished at her improved health and spirits. It's a miracle, they say.

Actually this was a demonstration of how much easier it often is to get along with non-relatives than with your own kin. Mrs. Morris is far less critical of Mrs. Owen's housekeeping than of her own daughter's because with Mrs. Owen she has no feeling of "I'm her mother and she ought to do as I say." When she talks about how children should be taught manners, Mr. Owen smiles indulgently and thinks she's "cute." No slumbering resentment from long ago

is awakened to complicate his relationship with her. We all know how readily we can forgive in others quirks which would embarrass or annoy us acutely in our own parents or children.

Where careful and intelligent screening brings together congenial hosts and boarders, foster home care offers an oldster an attractive combination of freedom and security. Only families with a liking for old people are put on the agency's list. Few would be willing to take all the trouble just for the few extra dollars it brings; they have warmth and affection to spare. The system is flexible: no boarder is obliged to stay in a home in which he is not happy. He is still in his own community and can maintain as much of his old life as his health permits.

Costs vary considerably. The Jewish Community Services of Long Island pay $145 a month to each family which takes in one of their clients. But the cost to the client may be as little as $70 (the amount of the old-age assistance grants paid per month to recipients living in boarding homes in that area). In the rare case of a client who is ineligible for public assistance and cannot pay $70 a month, a lower figure may be arrived at.

At the other end of the financial scale there is a private agency in New York City which is run by trained social workers. For a fee of around $125, this agency handpicks private foster homes to suit elderly clients' physical needs, temperaments, and quirks. Costs thereafter depend on the home chosen — typically about $40 a week.

Other cities where agencies have set up or are planning foster home programs for old people are Chicago, Baltimore, Philadelphia, Detroit, Cincinnati, Minneapolis, and Newark, New Jersey.

there is always some way out

If none of the living arrangements outlined above seems feasible for you, don't despair. Get in touch with your local Council of Social Agencies, your Community Chest, or your doctor. They will refer you to an agency that can help you. Many large cities today have community committees on the aging which also can refer you to the right place for help, whether with health, housing, finances,

job, or personal relations. Various religious groups have welfare agencies to aid their aged members. Whether the agency you go to is public or private, you need not feel that you are seeking "charity." Welfare agencies exist to counsel any citizen, rich or poor, who has personal or family difficulties.

In an emergency, call your local Red Cross chapter, Family Service Society, Salvation Army, police, fire or welfare department. Your doctor, pastor, or rabbi may also be able to help.

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

While you tackle your personal problem, you might also look into your community's approach to the general problem of aging. As an elderly person you may say, "I'm too old for that." But you could be wrong. A group of older women who joined a university seminar on problems of the aged were revitalized by that very activity. One made an exhibit to raise funds for the project, another wrote and sold an article about it, and all felt and looked younger as new social contacts and a sense of contributing perked them up.

wanted—a new view of old age

As community members, we might all start by re-examining our attitudes to old age. A reporter turned in to the local newspaper a story about a rural fair. Having heard that a prize-winning patchwork quilt had been made by an 82-year-old spinster, he drew on his imagination and wrote that she "whiled away her lonely days in bed by making patchwork quilts." The spinster retorted that, far from being lonely or bedridden, she enjoyed a rich social life, gardened a bit, and went on weekly shopping sprees to the neighboring town!

Perhaps we don't, like the reporter, think of all octogenarians as confined to bed, but in our culture we can hardly escape some stereotyped ideas about old age. Repeat the word *old* and see what other words come to mind. *Decrepit? Complaining? Set? Stodgy?*

To break down such associations, look at the facts. True, some

old ladies are bedfast, but others are jaunting around. One old man, stooped and hobbling, has given himself up to aches and pains at 60. Another — Arturo Toscanini — at 87 made his name a synonym for creative vigor. The process of aging varies so widely that we cannot generalize about it.

Even within an individual, aging is not uniform. One man has old, failing eyes, but young, skilled hands. Another has stiff, slow-moving joints, but a quick wit. This woman's arteries have aged, but her hearing is keen. That one cannot remember names, but never forgets a familiar recipe.

Like others, oldsters have ups and downs in health. It usually takes them longer to recuperate from illness, but in most cases recuperation is possible. Out of 608 apparently hopelessly bedfast patients in an old people's Home in Allegheny County, Pennsylvania, who were put through graduated exercises similar to those developed for paralytics, 80 per cent were finally able to walk around and take care of themselves. Patients with senile dementia have similarly improved when given sustained psychiatric care.

there are compensations

Most people do slow down and lose some of their elasticity as they grow older. But older workers generally make up for loss of speed and muscular strength with greater dependability and "stick-to-itiveness." Their skills have tended to increase with long practice. With the waning of youthful drives and ambitions, they have developed more emotional calmness and loyalty, and can make sounder judgments.

Of course, such compensations do not come to those who have never matured. In a second childhood they revert to the behavior patterns of the first childhood, out of which they never truly grew. Age must pay the penalties of youth, and a life of faulty nutrition, intoxication, emotional stresses, infections, injuries, laziness, overwork, or gluttony takes its toll. Constitutional factors play a role. And finally, the way society treats an individual as he ages affects his performance, for better or worse.

In a social climate that discriminates against the old, perhaps the saddest consequence is that the old accept this judgment. They expect to be feeble, crochety, and backward-looking. In studies with older people at Columbia University, it was decided to try teaching them Russian. One woman came to Professor Irving Lorge and said, "I'm too old to learn languages. . . . I'm too old to learn anything." Others in the group were just as negative. But in less than a week the very people who had been most doubtful about their powers were forging ahead. One student eventually translated a technical monograph from Russian into English and published it.

A friendlier social climate would not only help to prevent physical and mental breakdowns among the elderly, it would release all sorts of potentialities as well. In the long run it could hardly fail to improve their standard of living.

retirement to what?

Industry or community might help workers plan something to retire to. It might be a part-time job or lighter work. A watchmaker and jeweler, for example, switched to making violins, which was easier on his hands and eyes. Retraining programs for older workers could be set up in vocational high schools. More liberal attitudes to old age would make it less difficult for such workers to find jobs. Self-employment is another possibility for some. Retired workers can start small businesses, but should do so only after careful investigation. They also can do professional work in one of the arts, or market handicraft products.

Of course, some may deliberately choose a life of leisure. They want to enjoy the recreation and study they had little time for during their working lives. Whatever the plan, it fills what might otherwise be a frightening vacuum and a major cause of disease.

helping the old keep healthy

What does your community do, or what might it do, to help its senior citizens keep well? Elderly people often eat like sparrows, especially when they eat alone and their morale is low. With some

instruction in nutrition, they can at least balance their diet. Perhaps they can be persuaded to eat four or five light meals a day, instead of the customary three.

During the World War II influenza epidemic, the Women's Voluntary Services in England organized "Meals on Wheels" to deliver hot dinners to invalids. In some localities the service was kept up for the benefit of oldsters living alone, many of whom couldn't cope with marketing and cooking. The idea is now being tried out in Philadelphia. Besides raising the level of the old people's nutrition, it gives them a cheery contact with the outside world.

Less than 15 per cent of our citizens over 65 are estimated to have any health or hospital insurance. Few have cash resources for regular medical care. Consequently elderly people often postpone going to a doctor until they are seriously ill. Preventive health services (like those of some old-age homes for non-resident members) might be offered by hospitals to elderly patients at greatly reduced cost.

Mildly senile old people crowd our mental institutions all over the country, making up as many as one-third of the publicly supported patients. These sad, muddled old folks don't need the expensive facilities of a mental hospital. To lump them with out-and-out psychotics is cruel and wasteful. Some states are now trying out a plan which will at least keep such mildly disturbed old people separate from insane patients. Old-age homes with psychiatric services would be helpful.

housing senior citizens

Does your community consider its old folks in its housing plans? The conventional small house or apartment may present major difficulties for an elderly person. Yet with minor changes in planning, these difficulties would vanish.

Old folks need *accident-proof* housing, which would be good for citizens in general. A single floor level throughout the dwelling, with no raised thresholds. Automatic ignition of gas or, better still, electric cooking stoves. Mechanically operated casement windows,

protected, if they are low, by cross bars or a fixed lower part. Storage shelves within easy reach without climbing or low stooping. Non-slip bathroom floors. Bathtubs and showers with seats and grab-rails. Where steps (or ramps) lead into a building, handrails on both sides. Some oldsters also need sinks and toilet stools somewhat higher than is usual, and doorways wide enough to accommodate a wheel chair.

A sunny exposure is good for any one, but for a house-bound oldster it can be a key morale-booster. Thermostatically-controlled heating which can be raised at will to 75°F. is also desirable, since old folks have reduced resistance to cold.

The New York State Division of Housing is now setting aside for the aged at least 5 per cent of the apartments in state-aided housing projects. Two types of two-room apartments, with most of the features listed above, are planned, at rentals ranging from $15 to $30 a month. Many English housing projects include bungalow cottages for old people, grouped near a communal club and reading room. Montana, Massachusetts, and other states have developed similar plans.

Old-age institutions should be in communities where their residents belong — not in the country, however lovely the surrounding landscape. In rebuilding some of her blitzed neighborhoods, England has included accommodations for each potential phase of old age. They range from independent bungalows to communal homes with nursing facilities. Holland has a "closed circle" plan — a town within a town. Small cottages and flats for able-bodied old folks rim the circle and look towards the outer, normal town. Tenants who begin to need help move inward to accommodations of the hostel type. Finally they may reach the nursing home or hospital in the center, which is also used for cases of acute illness. But always they remain in the community they know. They are never entirely cut off from their former lives.

A Home for the Aged centered in a community can more easily provide non-resident aid of the kind already mentioned. It can invite non-residents in to share recreation and social activities. The

"out-patients" stimulate the feebler ones with their more independent and often healthier outlook. They bring a whiff of the outside world to infirm "shut-ins." With this flux in and out, the Home becomes a natural, organic part of the community.

keep active and interested — keep well

More day centers could cut the need for old-age homes. Recreation is not everything but, well-organized in a group setting, it is a form of preventive medicine. A day center or club offers this therapeutic activity during just those hours when old folks are most apt to feel cut off from the stream of life.

The physical disabilities of center members may not change much, but their attitudes towards them do. In one center in New York City, clinic visits dropped on the average 70 per cent after six months' membership. Of thirty members with cardiac conditions, several, according to their physicians, were too sick to be out of bed; but they came to the center regularly and suffered no relapse.

The centers' social workers do a good deal of case work and counseling. The timid and withdrawn are encouraged to be more outgoing, the over-aggressive to pipe down and give others a chance, the hostile and complaining to adopt a friendlier, more cheerful outlook. In short, members undergo a kind of group psychotherapy.

the team approach

Recreation and other community services, like visiting nurses and housekeepers, can keep many an oldster off the sick list. But sickness and other problems there will be. Piecemeal measures are not enough. What use is it for a doctor to prescribe drugs for old Mrs. Thompson who can't afford to buy them? Why advise limited activity to cardiac Mr. Jensen who must climb four flights of stairs to his room? What good are diet recommendations to Miss Vining who is too despairing and lonely to eat anything but the most haphazard snacks?

Doctor, nurse, institutional administrator, social worker, psychologist, recreation leader, physical and occupational therapist, visiting housekeeper, and various volunteers are coming together today to work as a team serving old folks in their difficulties. College professors are taking a hand in surveying the field. Physicians are developing a whole new specialty — Geriatrics.* As a society we are more and more becoming aware of the problems of aging, and are accepting the challenge.

the road winds uphill all the way

Fulfillment in old age, like fulfillment in other phases of life, depends upon intelligent effort. Those who begin the effort early, and strive all their lives to be contributing, self-sustaining personalities, will have in old age — not freedom from problems — but the ability to meet them successfully. Their reward is a continuing growth, to the very end.

But no human being should be asked to make that effort under the crushing burden of rejection by society. We all have a part in science's responsibility "not merely to add to the years of life, but more important to add life to the years." We must learn to accept old age, treat it with understanding and generosity in others, and meet it with courage and maturity when our turn comes.

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* For a health program for the aged, read *Live Long and Like It*, Public Affairs Pamphlet No. 139. 25 cents.

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